

THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE ELIOT BANK AND GORDONBROCK PRIMARY SCHOOLS FEDERATION

Minutes of a meeting of the Resources Committee held at Eliot Bank Primary School on Thursday, 23 February 2023 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Ms J. Bishop	
Mr T. Bremner	Chair
Ms C. Carboo-Ofulue	
Mr P. Fidel	
Ms M. Gilmore	Executive Headteacher
Mr P. Jenkins	Attended remotely
Ms F. Scott	

Also present

Ms S. McAllister	Federation Business Manager
Mrs J. Woods	Clerk
Mrs J. Wright	Head of School, Gordonbrock

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Albert. Mr Jenkins attended the meeting remotely via Zoom.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

Governors were reminded that they must declare conflicts and pecuniary interests before items were discussed, and must withdraw from the meeting while the item was under discussion.

3. TO AGREE THE BUSINESS FOR THE MEETING

The order in which items were to be discussed and those items which would be considered as urgent business was agreed upon.

Ms Gilmore was very sad to inform the Committee that Ms McAllister had resigned to take up a post at Sydenham School. This was an extremely exciting opportunity for her, and she would be leaving the Federation just after Easter. Ms McAllister had been at the Federation for ten years, and she said that it had been an extremely difficult decision to make which she had not taken lightly, but she must consider her career and progression opportunities.

Mr Bremner congratulated Ms McAllister on her promotion, and wished to record the Committee's gratitude for all she had done for the schools, in particular her astonishing attention to detail, keeping track of the budgets, and keeping governors extremely well informed. He said that she would be very sadly missed, but wished her luck for the future. Ms McAllister thanked governors for their support in return.

4. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

(a) To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

(b) Matters arising from the minutes

There were no matters arising from the minutes which were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

(c) Finance Strategy Group

The minutes of the meeting of the Finance Strategy Group held on 25 January 2023 had been circulated prior to the meeting. The Chair said that this had been an extremely

helpful session, and urged governors to read the comprehensive record of the discussions which had taken place. Eliot Bank was not facing quite such a severe budget position as had been anticipated previously, but there was still a problem which would be addressed and a follow up meeting would be held next term.

Ms Scott was mindful that Ms Carter had now left Gordonbrock, and expressed concern about the impact of losing the two most senior administrative staff in the Federation. Mr Bremner said that this would be discussed further under the urgent business item.

5. 2022/23 BUDGETS

Copies of the finance reports and cost centre summaries for both schools had been circulated prior to the meeting. The reports set out the funding received from the local authority, income, and expenditure. Ms McAllister said that the reports were self explanatory, and represented a very broad forecast of the position. Separate narrative reports would usually have been produced for the meeting, but this had not been possible, and comments had been included against each budget heading where appropriate.

Ms McAllister informed governors that both schools had received additional funding to be spent on sustainability measures. She had attended a training session the previous day at which it had been clarified that this was a one off additional capital grant, which would not need to be spent for three years, but the funding must be ring fenced for sustainability measures. **Ms Carboo-Ofulue asked if any guidelines were available for how this money should be spent.** Ms McAllister said that she would send the link to the guidelines to the Clerk for circulation to all members of the Committee. However, the amounts involved were fairly small: Eliot Bank had received £18,641.55 and Gordonbrock had received £22,397.08.

Ms Scott had attended a Lewisham training session earlier that week on climate emergency and offsetting the impact of the energy increase, and there were various programmes which could help schools. It was noted that the Premises Manager had attended a similar training session, and Ms McAllister confirmed that the schools met all the criteria at this time. She had not been able to investigate this fully yet because of the other additional work that she was covering.

Nursery admissions were increasing, and more requests were being received for full time places, particularly at Gordonbrock. There had also been a number of admissions at Eliot Bank for half day places. There had been little change in the funding situation since November, and just over £75,000 of funding was still awaited for both schools.

It could be seen from the budget vs actual reports that staffing costs, particularly support staff, were higher than had been budgeted for. A governor asked the reason for this, and Ms McAllister explained that support staff on lower pay scales had received pay increases of up to 10%, with more senior staff receiving rises of at least 4.8%. Although the budget plan had included provision for the pay increase, an increase of 10% had not been anticipated.

The supply budgets were above the profile because vacant teaching assistant and learning support assistants were still being covered by supply staff.

Mr Fidel asked the reason why the budget for midday meals supervisors at Gordonbrock appeared to be significantly overspent at 109.62%. Ms McAllister pointed out that she had only taken over management of the Gordonbrock budget on 31 January and would be reviewing the budget thoroughly to identify any possible miscodings. There had been ongoing difficulties in recruiting midday supervisors at Gordonbrock, and Ms McAllister thought that this was either incorrect or may be a miscoding, and she would investigate this.

A governor asked why no contributions to the school journey were shown in the Gordonbrock budget. Ms McAllister explained that Gordonbrock had a school fund account where the school journey contributions were paid whereas at Eliot Bank, contributions from parents were paid into

the main ISB. It was noted that the money in the school fund account would be transferred in March, at which point the budget would balance out.

6. BENCHMARKING INFORMATION

Ms McAllister reported back on the benchmarking exercise she had carried out for Eliot Bank and Gordonbrock, and explained how governors could access this information through the GIAS website online. She had used the data and comparable schools suggested by the DfE, and had made comparisons for 2021/22.

Both schools had in year deficits; Eliot Bank's had been £114,000, and Gordonbrock had a deficit of £70,000; in the case of Gordonbrock, the deficit had arisen because funds had not been transferred from the school fund account in time because of staff sickness. It was noted that both schools would have in year deficits this year.

The benchmarking information looked at a range of cost factors, and both schools were rated as medium risk because of the in year deficits; however, both schools had healthy brought forward balances. The revenue reserve for Eliot Bank was £317,000, and £1.08m for Gordonbrock. Both schools were in a very good position, and were low risk overall.

Eliot Bank was broadly in line with the other schools used for the comparison in terms of teaching staff, support staff, admin/clerical staff, and educational supplies. The only area where Eliot Bank was higher than the average was for supply, where 9.7% of the budget had been spent on supply costs, which put Eliot Bank in the top 10% of similar schools. This in turn pushed up the cost per pupil, and Eliot Bank was the third highest of the 15 comparable schools. **Ms Bishop asked if the justification for this was because of the restructure of the teaching assistants and sickness.** Ms Gilmore explained that supply cover had been in place in Years 3 and 4 for most of the year following resignations and difficulties in recruitment. Ms Carboo-Ofulue asked for more information on the recruitment issues. Ms Gilmore said that it had been necessary to make hard decisions about whether the supply teachers were good enough, and two of them had moved on. Although she was very happy with staffing now, the school had gone through a cycle of change. The Chair was not surprised by the high supply percentage, because governors had been kept aware of valid reasons for this.

Ms McAllister said that Eliot Bank was rated as green in all areas except for the percentage of the budget spent on senior leaders, which was higher than average because of the current structure with two deputy heads and two assistant heads.

Both schools had been compared against outcomes, and although they had in year deficits, the budget was spent on the pupils in the school, whereas it was apparent from the data that schools which underspent on teachers and other staff had lower average Key Stage 2 scores. For example, governors noted that one school with an in year surplus of £150,000 had Key Stage 2 outcomes which were well below average, and required improvement. Ms McAllister reminded governors that Mala Dadlani, the Head of Lewisham Finance, was always clear that schools must spend their budget allocation on the children who were in the school now.

Ms McAllister said that although the school would be RAG rated as red because of the in year deficit, it was important to understand the reasons for this, and for the Governing Body to be able to stand their ground if challenged. **Ms Bishop asked if there could be an issue if the school continued to be in the top 20%**, but Ms Gilmore emphasised that this was not the case at present.

Ms Carboo-Ofulue was mindful that the schools were being benchmarked against similar schools, but if they were benchmarked against independent schools the picture would be very different. Mr Fidel pointed out that independent schools were not inspected in this way.

Ms McAllister said that the similar schools which had been selected for the benchmarking exercise had been chosen by the DfE, and included schools across the country as well as some Lewisham schools, but it was possible to select other schools on the website. It was noted that Edmund Waller had been included for Eliot Bank and John Ball and Cooper's Lane had been selected for Gordonbrock. In choosing the schools, it was important to look at a number of characteristics including the size, the percentage of children on free school meals, and outcomes because it was possible for schools to benchmark against any schools to make them look better/worse, the DfE selected the schools with the characteristics which they thought were the most similar.

With regard to Gordonbrock, the school was fourth highest in respect of expenditure on supply. **Mr Bremner asked the reason for this**, and Ms McAllister reminded governors that this was because of the high proportion of learning support assistants who were being employed on a supply basis pending decisions on restructuring. In addition, the pupil/adult ratio was slightly higher, because of the differences in teaching assistant time at the schools.

The information showed that Gordonbrock and Eliot Bank had both made savings in staff, and although the picture had levelled out a bit, staffing levels had never increased, while Key Stage 2 scores had still remained very strong.

It was agreed that Ms McAllister would send the link to the benchmarking website to the Clerk for circulation to governors.

7. STAFFING ISSUES

(a) Eliot Bank

Ms Gilmore informed governors that one of the part time Year 6 teachers had gone on family leave, but the other part time teacher had been able to increase her days and the initial handover had been quite seamless. A supply teacher, who had previously worked at the school, was also working in Year 6, together with support from Jenny Klein and the new Assistant Headteacher.

There were currently vacancies for two midday supervisors and two nursery midday supervisors.

(b) Gordonbrock

There were currently six teaching assistant posts and five learning support assistant posts covered by supply staff. It had been possible to recruit one of the supply staff to a permanent midday supervisor post, and further interviews were due to be held the following week.

It was noted that Anne Carter had left in January, and Shanee Khan had left in December. Mrs Wright said that a temporary admin officer had been recruited who had experience in finance, and another supply administrator had also been appointed. All staff in the office were working very hard, and she hoped that it might be possible to recruit one of the supply staff to a permanent post.

8. PREMISES AND HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

Glen Goode was welcomed to the meeting, and the Chair thanked him for his comprehensive report which had been circulated prior to the meeting. The report gave updates on all statutory requirements, health and safety issues, other building works or premises projects completed to date, defects or updates, repairs and maintenance issues and pending works for the future.

Eliot Bank

Mr Goode raised an issue around the ownership of the boundary fencing. This had not been an issue in the past, but the residents had carried out some work which had made the fence near to the front of the school unsafe, and had had asked the school to make this

safe again. Mr Goode explained that the residents had dug into the foundations, which had affected the stability of the fence, and the local authority was being consulted for clarification of ownership of the fence. In the meantime, Ms Gilmore said that the school had offered to stabilise the fence in the interests of safety. She said that the residents were saying that because the school had maintained the fence in the past, it was the school's responsibility to continue, but she stressed that any previous work would only have been carried out for the safety of the children, irrespective of ownership.

Ms McAllister had spoken to Fiona Gavin in Estates Management, and it would be necessary to look at the Ordnance Survey map to establish ownership.

Mr Jenkins asked whether the neighbour was an owner occupier or a housing association tenant, and it was noted that they owned the property. He said that whoever owned the fence, if the residents had caused the damage, the onus would be on them to repair it.

Mr Bremner asked if access to the school land was needed to repair the fence. Mr Goode said that the residents had asked to come into the school grounds to fix the fence during term time, but this had clearly not been possible for the safety of the children. The resident had now emailed to say that they would be charging the school for this work. Ms Gilmore said that she would pursue the issue of ownership with Fiona Gavin and would keep governors updated.

Gordonbrock

Mr Goode informed governors that a fault had arisen with the fire alarm panel just before half term which had caused it to become corrupt, and it was unable to support some areas of the school. Repairs had been carried out during half term, but the panel was not giving the correct information. Mr Goode said that there had been issues about the cost of the work and who would carry it out, but the school had a sprinkler system as a back up, and he had received confirmation from the insurance company that the school was still covered fully against fire.

Mr Goode said that there were now issues with some of the equipment which was getting past the ten year period. In particular, it was impossible to get the lighting tubes any more. Ms Carboo-Ofulue asked whether the sustainability money could be used for this type of work, particularly at Gordonbrock, and it was agreed that this was a possibility. ***Ms Bishop asked whether Gordonbrock had a heat pump fitted;*** it was noted that a heat pump was attached to the biomass boiler, which had been a requirement of Lewisham.

9. SCHOOLS FINANCIAL VALUE STANDARD (SFVS)

Ms McAllister reminded governors that the deadline for the submission of the SFVS report to Lewisham Finance had been 14 February, but the DfE deadline was 31 March. Mala Dadlani was aware that she was under extreme pressure at the moment, and had been agreed that the report could be admitted a little later than this. Ms McAllister said that she would send the report to Mr Bremner for consideration, and this would then be presented to the Governing Body at their meeting on 13 March. She said that the findings of the recent audit would be used as a basis for many of the questions.

Ms Gilmore thanked Ms McAllister formally for the additional work she had taken on in covering Ms Carter's role.


Ms McAllister left the meeting.

10. URGENT BUSINESS

Ms Gilmore had discussed two urgent staffing issues with Mr Fidel and Mr Jenkins the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and with Mr Bremner as Chair of the Resources Committee, which are reported under the confidential section of these minutes.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Governors were reminded that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Monday, 15 May 2023 at 6.00 p.m.

Chair 

Date 15th MAY 2023